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Senate passes Kuipers' legislation to lift ban on scholarships for religious-studies students

Lansing – A package of bills that makes college theology, divinity and religious-education majors eligible for scholarships or grant money from the state of Michigan passed the Senate today, Sen. Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland) announced.

The seven-bill, bipartisan package was introduced last year to end the practice of discrimination against certain types of academic study.

“This package allows religious-studies students to be treated as other college majors,” Kuipers said. “With Hope College in my district being one of the top religious-studies institutions nationally, I know how important this legislation is to students and their families.”

Michigan resident Teresa Becker is a student who does not have equal access to the more than \$242 million awarded yearly to students in grants and scholarships because she chose to study theology.

Becker filed a lawsuit against the state last year when her scholarship was rescinded based on her major of study. Federal District Judge George Caram Steeh ruled the state is prohibited from enforcing the statute preventing her from receiving scholarship money.

The legislation would affect five main programs: The Michigan Merit Scholarship, the Michigan Educational Opportunity Grant, the Michigan Competitive Scholarship, the Part-time Independent Student Grant, and the state's Tuition Grant programs.

Changing the law also would help the state avoid future potential law suits, as the existing language could be deemed a violation the Michigan Constitution.

“My bill specifically applies to students at independent colleges such as Hope and Calvin who seek state assistance for religious studies,” Kuipers said of his part of the package, Senate Bill 629.

Senate Bills 625-629, and 661 and 662 now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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